

President Dille's Inaugural Address

On Wednesday, November 20 before an audience that included his family, students and faculty, state and civic officials and delegates from 60 colleges, universities and learned societies, Dr. Roland Dille was inaugurated as the eighth president of Moorhead State College. The text of his inaugural address follows:

* * *

On this occasion, I feel called upon to attempt to give a shape to my vague understanding of purposes. I believe that one of the aims of a college president, in a time of change, must be to try to make certain that the experience of man is not ignored or forgotten. The experience of man, reflected in the events that he shaped or that shaped him, reflected in his art and in his ideas, reflected in the hypotheses of scientists and in the traditions of the inarticulate — this experience, which is the substance of education, can give us an understanding of what we truly are and of what we may be, can give us the vision that must govern change.

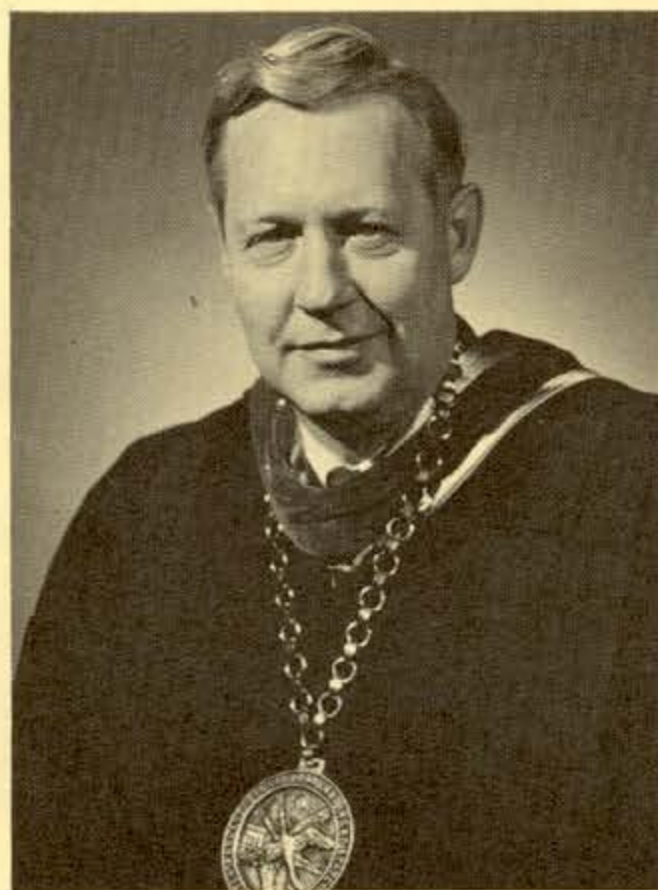
We will not easily find the necessary vision in an exploration of our own experience, whether that experience is unique or common, for we are all beset with the excessive subjectivity of the age, a subjectivity that invites us to be moved by either the dark pulse of the blood or by the arrogant assumption of special knowledge. We will not easily find the necessary vision in the values and actions of a society that denies the complex potentialities of man. We will not easily find the necessary vision in an education that worships facts.

Men are agreed that the future will be different; more and more, men agree that the future must be different. Not only in the cry of anguish raised by the young but also in our own middle-aged discontent do we discover a sense of entrapment in a world that does not challenge our minds, that does not give us understanding, that does not stretch our imagination, that does not arouse our sympathies, that does not speak to our spirit, that does not show us what it means to be human.

But sterility does not recognize sterility, and if we protest, we protest out of the lessons we have learned from the long experience of man; we judge our time not by any other time but by values that have emerged out of all times, and our disappointments are recognizably disappointments only because we share expectations that men have lived by since the beginning of time.

I am not recommending anything so simple as the study of history, but let us consider the past out of which have emerged what we once called "civilized values," those ideals that seem now so

The business of a college is to search the experience of man for clues to our own humanity . . .



DR. ROLAND DILLE
President of Moorhead State College

conspicuously absent as motives for either public or private action. To glorify the past is to forget that public action has never been much motivated by ideals and that men have always acted out of self-interest, when they recognized it, and from the pressures of society when they did not. The history of man is a record of man's inhumanity to man, is a record of justice denied, of virtue scorned, of hopes blighted, a record written in blood on shifting sands.

And yet we reach back, seeking in the past a sign of hope for the future. And we can find it, in the great works, in the great ideas; in heroic action, in unheroic endurance.

But the lesson of human experience is not to be found in a cataloguing of the glories of the past any more than it is to be found in unrelenting repetition of unjust and evil actions. It is to be found in the enduring search for ideal possibilities, in the affirmation of the human spirit seeking a vision by which man might live.

It is a lesson for us because those ideal possibilities are not a fantasy created to substitute for the bleak actuality of man, but are affirmations of man, of his will to endure, of his capacity to dream, of his ability to love, of his desire to be free, of his power to believe, of his hopes for justice and for order. Man's possibilities, frustrated by harsh circumstance, have endured, his search for the necessary vision has gone on.

And goes on today. And is frustrated today.

For if some of the circumstances in which man sought his direction have disappeared, society still requires, indeed, permits little of what we potentially are. For society urges on us a kind of simplification that does not enough consider the complex potentialities of man, and it has created out of a variety of inessentials a kind of complicatedness that is as untrue to what man ordinarily is as it is untrue to what he might be. To reject the inessentials in the search not for simplifications but for simplicity, and therefore for truth, is part of our aim. But the search for the real nature of man cannot be guided only by a reliance on the simple understanding of instinct.

The alternative to false values are not no-values. And so great is our capacity for self-deception that it may be folly to claim that the alternatives to false values are true values.

The alternative is the search for values, a search guided by the certainty that there are ideals higher than those that ordinarily move us. And so we ransack the past, and the present, not in an examination of fleshless ideas but in a testing of our human impulses against the larger experience of man.

If we examine the past with more than a spirit of antiquarianism and if we look to our contemporaries with something more than curiosity — if, indeed, we as a college believe that knowledge is not in itself enough — we will find in the experience of man an invitation to our own humanity; and we will find in the minds and spirits and imaginations of our fellows, dead and living, some hope that our humanity will endure.

This is the business of a college.

It is a business that we have not carried out well. We have pronounced our gentlemanly strictures upon society in voices resonant with the arrogance of the ivory tower. We have surveyed the great traditions with care and even with reverence. But we have not often sought in our classrooms alternatives to the values we denigrate, alternatives that are clearly relevant, alternatives that oppose the power of society to narrow, to impoverish, to deny.

Yet even in our failures we have insisted on some things. We have insisted that in an age of techniques, the pursuit of knowledge still matters; that in a world man has made ugly, beauty is still worth the search; that in a world of trivial opinions, truth may be approached.